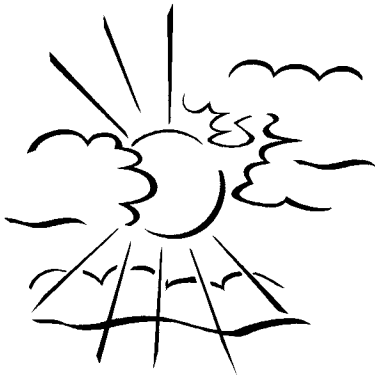


***Department
of
Human
Services***

Prepared by the
DHS Office of
Communications
(517) 373-7394



*Important story at this spot

Articles in Today's Clips

Friday, March 3, 2006

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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Judge: No excuses when dealing with children

Web-posted Mar 3, 2006

By STEPHEN FRYE

Of The Oakland Press

Saying he is frustrated by orders not being followed, an Oakland County judge found the state's Department of Human Services in continuing contempt Thursday and ordered that all of the agency's cases in Oakland County be reviewed.

But an agency spokeswoman said the judge's concerns were already being addressed. Formerly the Family Independence Agency, the state agency contains Child Protective Services and is charged with handling cases in which neglect or abuse is alleged or if the case involves foster care. Oakland County Circuit Court Judge James Alexander, the presiding judge over the Family Division who issued the order, said caseworkers must respond more quickly to court orders.

"We're dealing with children," Alexander said. "We can't have excuses. We have to provide the services." Attorney Ryan Deel, who works exclusively with children's cases, said that this is a major order from a court, but he did not yet know what kind of direct effect it will have. "This is huge," said Deel. However, leaders of the human services department said they continue to provide the best services they can, but high employee turnover and high caseloads are realities of their business.

"I'm not really sure why this happened," said Karen Stock, director of communications for the agency. "We're perplexed by the order because we've actually acted on the things Judge Alexander ordered."

She said vacant positions have been filled, with all new employees starting by the end of this month, and additional supervisors have been brought in to ensure that court orders are followed through on before court hearings.

In Oakland County, the human services department oversees more than 1,700 children in foster care, said Margaret Warner, state human services department director for Oakland County. Last year, they investigated nearly 5,500 claims of abuse or neglect, she said.

Alexander wants a former Oakland County circuit court judge to oversee all county cases involving the agency. Robert Webster, who also is a former state bar president, will review the cases.

"If I can do some good to move things along with DHS services to the court, I would be happy to do that," said Webster, 73.

Webster, who served as a judge from 1973 to 1982, is a member of the Cox, Hodgman and Giarmarco law firm in Troy. He said his role will become more defined as the judge's order is studied.

"I think it's more a matter of trying to locate problem areas and increase the efficiency of the delivery of services to the court," Webster said.

The contempt finding stemmed from two cases in which Alexander ordered specific services. In one, a 10-year-old girl was ordered to be given psychological treatment after writing out a suicide note but had not received treatment.

"Thank God she didn't kill herself," Alexander said.

The second case involved an order for five siblings living in three homes - because of a neglect charge - to visit one another, he said. Since September, when the order was made, only two such visits had been conducted, and only one of those was arranged by the caseworker.

One child in that case has a foster family ready to adopt, but paperwork was only filed this week, though the adoption request was made in November, Alexander said. While the 6-year-old boy was eligible for adoption Nov. 30, Alexander said, paperwork was not started until March 1. "It's hard for children to get adopted," he said. "It's just a matter of getting the paperwork in."

Details of the judge's order include:

That the county's office must have all of its job vacancies filled by May 15;

That each of the court's open cases is reviewed monthly with the first reports filed by May 15;

That court orders within the agency's reports be given firm completion dates;

That one particular worker be replaced on all cases.

Stock said that the issue with the specific worker will also have to be studied by the attorney general.

Warner said staff retention is one of the biggest issues facing the agency, and 15 new employees have recently been hired to handle the high turnover rate.

"It is a really difficult field of work to be in," said Warner. "With limited resources, we really try to do the best we can."

Alexander ordered that Webster can recommend when to dismiss the contempt order when "he believes the Department is in compliance with its mission and with all orders of the Court."

Alexander said the primary goal of his order is "to make sure they are doing their job as best as they can do it. What it means is they have to do their jobs."

Oakland County

NEWS IN A MINUTE: Oakland County

March 3, 2006

Detroit Free Press

PONTIAC: Judge: Agency hasn't followed orders in cases

Oakland County's presiding family court judge found the state Department of Human Services in "continuing contempt" Thursday for failing to follow court orders to care for abused and neglected children.

In his finding, Judge James Alexander said his orders were not followed to provide psychological counseling for a girl who had threatened suicide, and in another case the department had failed to arrange visitation for five siblings living in three foster-care placements. "In both matters, the Court finds that the Department had the ability to comply and simply did not," Alexander wrote.

He also ordered the department to remove one foster-care worker from "all files she is working on that are on the Oakland County Family Court Docket and is not assigned any work relating to matters before this court."

In a statement, DHS spokeswoman Karen Stock said DHS officials are perplexed by the contempt order because "we had already done everything he asked us on the cases that were before him on Feb. 16.

"Now that we have the order in front of us, we are reviewing it with the" Attorney General's Office "to explore our legal options," Stock said.

By Jack Kresnak

Mother of dead Williamston boy called evil in court

March 3, 2006

BY JACK KRESNAK
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

MASON -- Jackson School District employees painted a disturbing portrait Thursday of a woman accused of killing her 7-year-old adopted son in Ingham County.

Witnesses described Lisa Holland as mean and evil and as a mother who insisted that her son, Ricky Holland, be restrained in a harness when he didn't need it.

She insisted that Ricky be clipped with a harness to his seat on the school bus that took him to kindergarten and first grade every day at Cascades School in Jackson, bus driver Marcia Polly testified in 55th District Court in Mason. Polly was among several school employees who said Ricky's mother seemed abusive.

Lisa Holland and her husband, Tim Holland, of Williamston are charged with first-degree murder in Ricky's death. Each has accused the other of killing the boy, who disappeared in July. In January, Tim Holland led authorities to Ricky's body, which was stuffed in a garbage bag and left in a Leroy Township field.

The former school nurse at Cascades, Carol Coxon, said she made at least three reports to Child Protective Services about Ricky. She said she dispensed Ritalin for the boy and saw him every day.

One day, Coxon said Ricky had a 101-degree fever, and that Lisa Holland didn't want to pick up her son. When Ricky saw his mother that day, Coxon said he stuffed his pockets with crackers and said: " 'Please don't make me go home, nurse. Please don't make me go home. Let me stay in school. Let me stay in school.' He screamed it over and over again."

Polly, Coxon and teacher's aide Joan Thomas all said Ricky was constantly hungry. Thomas said she was concerned that Ricky was extremely thin. He often had carrot sandwiches even though he had said he didn't like carrots.

Polly and special education bus attendant Debra Jones said they often bought snacks for Ricky. Jones testified that she noticed Lisa Holland frequently scolded Ricky when he got off the bus, and Polly said the boy would flinch if someone raised a hand around him.

When Polly spoke with Lisa Holland about why she scolded Ricky, she said the boy's mother told her, "You haven't seen the real Ricky yet."

Andrew Abood, one of Lisa Holland's attorneys, asked Polly, "You would agree with me that you didn't like" Lisa Holland?

"I would agree that she is evil," Polly responded.

Testimony is expected to continue today and through the beginning of next week in Judge Rosemarie Aquilina's courtroom.

The judge dropped contempt of court penalties Thursday for Ingham County Medical Examiner Dr. Dean Sienko and Dr. Joyce DeJong, medical director of forensic pathology at Sparrow Hospital in Lansing. But Aquilina ordered both doctors not to speak publicly about the Hollands' case.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or at jkresnak@freepress.com.

State was warned of Ricky's abuse

School employees testify that they called Human Services at least 4 times

Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News
March 3, 2006

MASON -- Jackson school district employees called the state Department of Human Services at least four times, suspecting that Ricky Holland was being abused, according to testimony Thursday.

The 7-year-old's body was found in rural Ingham County more than six months after he disappeared from his Williamston home; his adoptive parents, Tim and Lisa Holland, are accused of murdering him.

On Thursday, the third day of the Hollands' preliminary hearing, school employees also testified that they fed Ricky snacks and juice boxes because he was always hungry. They said the child was sent to school with lunches of only bread and carrots or celery.

Defense attorneys for the Hollands asked the judge to bar Ricky's medical records from being introduced into evidence. Assistant Ingham County Prosecutor Michael Ferency says those record could prove abuse.

"An argument could be made that Ricky was being starved," Ferency said.
A ruling is expected today.

Carol Coxson, the nurse at Cascades Elementary in Jackson, where Ricky attended first and second grades, said she saw bumps and bruises on the child on numerous occasions. He also came to school wearing a soiled diaper and had a rash.

Coxson said she received one follow-up from state workers who had determined her concerns were "unwarranted."

Also Thursday, Jackson school district bus driver Marcia Polly said school officials ordered Ricky to wear a harness, similar to a straightjacket. She said the child was well-behaved and the device was unnecessary.

Testimony continues today in Mason District Court.

You can reach Karen Bouffard at (734) 462-2206 or kbouffard@detnews.com.

Published March 3, 2006

Nurse: Ricky was afraid to go home She also testifies boy never said parents hurt him

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

MASON - During a visit to the school nurse's office while a first-grader in Jackson, Ricky Holland saw his mother walking down the hall to pick him up.

"Please don't make me go home, nurse. Please don't make me go home," Ricky screamed, according to testimony Thursday by Carol Coxon.

Ricky also started taking crackers from a lunch tray and stuffing them into his pockets, the nurse said.

But under cross-examination from Lisa Holland's co-counsel Andrew Abood, Coxon said Ricky never told her his parents hurt him.

That testimony came during the third day of Lisa and Tim Holland's preliminary hearing in 55th District Court. The hearing will determine whether the murder case against Ricky's parents will advance to trial.

Tim Holland reported his 7-year-old son missing July 2. Ricky's badly decomposed remains were found seven months later.

The Hollands lived in Jackson, where Ricky attended Cascades Elementary School, before moving to Williamston in May 2005.

Coxon went on to testify Thursday that she once found coin-sized bruises on Ricky's upper body and reported the incident to Child Protective Services.

When confronted, Lisa Holland said the bruises came from a harness Ricky was required to wear on the school bus, Coxon testified.

The bus driver who drove Ricky to and from Cascades for two years testified Thursday she thought the harness was unnecessary. Marcia Polly and a bus driver's assistant, Debra Jones, said they went against the direction of school officials by not using the harness.

Under cross-examination, Polly acknowledged she was disregarding school district policy by not using the harness; she told Abood it may have been the wrong decision.

Polly and Jones also said Ricky often was hungry, and they would give him snacks and juice they bought from a vending machine.

Assistant Prosecutor Mike Ferency said in court that Ricky was being starved - part of a pattern of mental abuse by his parents that affected his development.

Polly also testified she was worried for Ricky's safety at home and that she reported her concerns to her supervisor as well as to Child Protective Services.

The bus driver said she once described Lisa Holland as evil.

"I thought she might have been mean to (Ricky)," Polly said.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

What's next

- A preliminary hearing for Tim and Lisa Holland continues at 9 a.m. today in 55th District Court in Mason. Both face murder charges in the death of their 7-year-old adopted son, Ricky.

Judge warns doctors

- District Judge Rosemarie Aquilina said Thursday that two medical officials involved in Ricky Holland's autopsy could not release any further information about the case to the public. Dr. Dean Sienko, Ingham County chief medical examiner, and Dr. Joyce DeJong, a forensic pathologist at Sparrow Hospital, held a news conference Tuesday at which they said the boy's injuries showed "a pattern of abuse." Aquilina had threatened to hold them in contempt of court.

School officials testify in couple's murder hearing

3/2/2006, 6:52 p.m. ET

By DAVID EGGERT
The Associated Press

MASON, Mich. (AP) — Prosecutors used the testimony of school officials Thursday to try and show a pattern of physical and mental abuse by Ricky Holland's adoptive parents, who are accused of killing him.

Carol Coxon, a former nurse at Cascades Elementary School in Jackson, said she examined Ricky at the request of the school principal and found bruises on his shoulders, upper back and upper chest.

She said Ricky's mother, Lisa Holland, told her the bruises came from a harness he wore on the school bus, but Coxon testified the cloth harness wouldn't have caused bruising unless he had been in a high-speed accident.

Coxon reported the bruises to Child Protective Services, which sent her a letter saying the complaint didn't warrant an investigation, according to Coxon. She said under questioning from defense attorneys that she no longer had a record of those complaints because she'd thrown away her copies when she changed schools.

Coxon said she filed at least two other reports to the state Family Independence Agency, now the Department of Human Services. State officials have promised a full review of their actions involving Ricky's case.

The testimony came on the third day of a preliminary examination for Tim and Lisa Holland.

They are each charged with open murder and first-degree child abuse in Ricky's death.

The 7-year-old vanished from his Williamston home 15 miles east of Lansing last Fourth of July weekend. The family had moved from Jackson just months before.

Tim Holland led authorities to Ricky's body in rural Ingham County in late January. Each parent denies being responsible for Ricky's death, and each has accused the other of killing him.

Prosecutors suggest Ricky's bruises, his constant hunger, the fact that he once had to wear a dirty pull-up diaper to school and didn't have proper winter clothing was evidence of physical and mental abuse by his parents.

Bus driver Marcia Polly and bus attendant Debra Jones, Jackson Public Schools employees, said Lisa Holland wanted Ricky harnessed on a special education bus during kindergarten and first grade. But the bus officials stopped the practice because he was well-behaved.

"We put him in it, drove a couple blocks and took him out," said Jones, the bus attendant, who no longer works for the district.

The bus workers also said they gave Ricky a snack and juice regularly because he was hungry, and they testified that they sometimes had to search for the boy after school because he was off looking for food. Earlier this week, Williamston neighbors said in court that they had seen Ricky getting food from trash bins.

Defense attorneys for Lisa Holland criticized the bus workers for breaking school policy and deciding not to harness Ricky without the Hollands' permission. They said the bus officials

disregarded Ricky's safety because he had been diagnosed with impulse-control problems and other behavioral disorders.

Joan Thomas, who worked as a teacher's aide in Ricky's kindergarten class, said he often missed out on play time because he wouldn't eat the lunch he brought from home. She said he didn't like carrots, which often were included in his lunches. Under questioning from defense attorneys, Thomas agreed that carrots are nutritious.

"Ricky was a very intelligent child. But his social behaviors were not always appropriate," she said, adding that Ricky and his kindergarten teacher didn't get along.

Mike Nichols, an attorney for Lisa Holland, also questioned the bus workers about giving Ricky food from a vending machine without his parents' permission.

Assistant Prosecutor Michael Ferency said Thursday that Ricky may have been starved by his parents.

"He was short, he was skinny, he was voracious in his appetite," he said.

Also Thursday, state lawmakers created a new legislative committee to look at child protection issues, including Ricky's case. The panel will review information it receives from the Office of the Children's Ombudsman, which has been asked to investigate the situation and prepare a report.

Michigan Report

March 2, 2006

DEROCHE CALLS FOR CHILD PROTECTION SUBCOMMITTEE

House Speaker Craig DeRoche (R-Novi) has created a Special Committee on Child Protection to evaluate the state's services in that area, including what went wrong in the case of Ricky Holland.

Rep. David Law (R-Commerce Twp.) has been selected to chair the subcommittee, along with members Rep. Rick Baxter (R-Concord), Rep. Stephen Adamini (D-Marquette) and Rep. Bill McConico (D-Detroit).

"The death of Ricky Holland is an example of what can go horribly wrong when children are not protected by those the state entrusts to do so," Mr. Law said in a release. "We owe it to children who still may be in dangerous situations to find out what went wrong and make immediate adjustments."

The Legislature has received information on the case under Arianna's Law, which passed in January 2005 and allows lawmakers to view case files from the Office of Children's Ombudsman that previously had been shielded because of privacy concerns. Ricky Holland's parents have been charged with his murder.

Are program failures caused by underfunding?

Friday, March 3, 2006

Kalamazoo Gazette Editorial

The warning signs were all there: A hungry 7-year-old boy who was found rummaging in a neighbor's refrigerator, and asking if he could come live with her.

Strange bruises on the boy, consistent with abuse injuries, who often was brought to school on a leash and made to wear diapers.

Suspicious of abuse were reported by school employees to state officials. Nothing was done. The case surrounding the apparent murder of Ricky Holland, who was found dead in a ditch near Williamston six months after his adoptive parents had reported he had run away, is forcing state officials to take a closer look at the job it is doing protecting children. Ricky's adoptive parents, Tim and Lisa Holland, have been charged with the boy's murder.

State lawmakers have pledged to hold hearings on the case to see where the Department of Human Services failed.

Lawmakers must also look to themselves to see what role they have played in the failure of the system.

Last year, the state Office of the Children's Ombudsman made it clear to lawmakers that DHS workers were carrying caseloads that far exceeded their abilities to handle them competently. The Office of the Children's Ombudsman was set up by Gov. John Engler as an independent agency to investigate complaints about the way the former Family Independence Agency, now the DHS, was handling child welfare cases.

In its report to lawmakers last year, the OCO warned that DHS's staff had become too small. The public has witnessed quite a spectacle of official incompetence -- and not just from the DHS. Last month, three people in Macomb County were murdered by a man who was mistakenly released from custody over an erroneous understanding of state corrections policies.

Last Sunday, a young man killed two people and himself in a shooting spree that started at a Detroit church over the man's girlfriend. Earlier, the girlfriend complained to Detroit police that he had assaulted her and she wanted to press charges. Police never followed up on her complaint. Are cash-starved state and local governments reaching the point of not being able to fulfill their most important role -- protect the public?

Certainly Michigan's frustratingly persistent stagnant economy is where most of the budget problems come from. But starving state and local governments has a real impact on the lives of people.

State and local officials can't cut their way out of these problems. They must use the tools they have -- in new and creative ways -- and start investing again in our most important resource: people.

Senate approves Ruffin as children's ombudsman

3/2/2006, 11:16 a.m. ET

The Associated Press

MLIVE

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Verlie Ruffin was approved as the state's new Children's Ombudsman by the state Senate on Thursday.

Ruffin, of Detroit, was praised by both Republicans and Democrats as an advocate for children. Her nomination was confirmed by a 34-0 vote.

Ruffin was appointed by Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm last month. She replaces Lynne Martinez, who resigned last year and unsuccessfully ran for Lansing mayor.

Ruffin previously was associate director of the Michigan Federation for Children and Families for 20 years.

The Office of the Children's Ombudsman is an independent government agency that works to assure the safety and welfare of Michigan children related to foster care, adoption, and protective services.

The office investigates complaints and recommends changes to improve law, policy, and practice that benefit children's welfare.

It announced two weeks ago that it had started investigating the death of 7-year-old Ricky Holland, whose adoptive parents have been charged with open murder and first degree child abuse.

The agency will determine whether the Department of Human Services or other child-placing agencies violated any laws, rules or policies and could make recommendations for changes.

Michigan Report

March 2, 2006

RUFFIN APPOINTMENT CONFIRMED

With praise continuing to flow from both sides of the aisle, the Senate approved Thursday the appointment of Verlie Ruffin as children's ombudsman.

The appointment had been approved unanimously Tuesday by the Senate Families and Human Services, and the full chamber discharged the Senate Government Operations Committee of consideration of the appointment so the full body could act.

"She has a long career in situations and issues dealing with children," said Sen. Bill Hardiman (R-Kentwood), chair of the Families and Human Services Committee.

"After reading her resume and speaking with her, Ms. Ruffin appears to be a perfect fit for this office," said Sen. Irma Clark-Coleman (D-Detroit). "She has dedicated her life to helping those children and their families."

She was most recently associate director of the Michigan Federation for Children and Families, but has also served as a foster care worker and supervisor. She has also served on a variety of task forces including former Lt. Governor Connie Binsfeld's adoption task force.

Wayne County

NEWS IN A MINUTE: Wayne County

Detroit Free Press

March 3, 2006

CANTON: Man to stand trial in fatal battering of 8-month-old

A Canton man, charged with killing his girlfriend's 8-month-old son, will stand trial on one count of first-degree murder in Wayne County Circuit Court.

Judge John MacDonald, in 35th District Court in Plymouth Township, bound Carlee Hines Jr. over for trial Thursday during a preliminary hearing.

Hines, 23, remains in the Wayne County Jail, with a March 16 court date scheduled. Canton police said he battered Eryck Mark-Eugene Fossett at his paternal grandmother's apartment in Canton on Jan. 10. Eryck's mother, Erica Rodwell, was at work while Hines took care of the child.

Laura Weingarden, assistant Wayne County prosecutor, said Rodwell testified during the hearing that Hines remains her "best friend in the whole world." The two are still dating, Weingarden said.

Also at the hearing, Canton Police Sgt. Rick Pomorski read Hines' statement to police, Weingarden said. In the statement, Hines said he punched Eryck with both fists because the baby was crying while Hines played a video game.

Eryck died from a torn spleen and liver. He also had nine broken ribs.

By Naomi R. Patton

Nurse: Yost turned emotion 'on and off' at daughter's bedside

Friday, March 03, 2006

By CRYSTAL HARMON
BAY CITY TIMES WRITER

A registered nurse at Bay Regional Medical Center testified Thursday about the unusual behavior of Donna A. Yost as she sat by her dying daughter's bedside.

"She was turning the emotion on and off," said Sylvia Levitte, who was working in the emergency room the night Monique Yost was brought in with heart and lung failure.

"After the child was pronounced dead, she was sitting on the side of the bed in a chair. When she'd make eye contact with me, she'd suddenly start crying, 'my baby, my baby,'" Levitte said.

"Then I took a couple of steps back and peeked into the room and she was sitting here without any emotion. When she looked back and saw me standing there, she'd start crying again."

Levitte was one of several people to take the witness stand on Thursday in Bay County Circuit Court - day two of the Donna Yost murder trial.

Donna Yost, 46, is accused of killing 7-year-old Monique, with a lethal dose of prescription drugs. If convicted, she faces up to life in prison.

On Thursday, the 16-person jury also heard testimony from a former school principal and two of Monique's teachers, an emergency room nurse, a detective and a pharmacist.

Former Washington Elementary School Principal Joseph Buggs said he remembers Monique Yost as a "cool little girl who was very unique."

"She was a happy girl," he said. "She was real small. Everybody liked her. She kind of stuck out in a crowd."

Buggs said the last time he saw Monique, she was singing and skipping down the hall from her special education class to her home room on Friday, Oct. 8, 1999.

Two days later, Monique would die of a fatal dose of Imipramine, an anti-depressant medication prescribed to her to combat bed-wetting and sleep problems.

One teacher, Karna Mattison, described Monique as "always happy," but a student who struggled to pay attention.

Another, Reyna Timm, said there "wasn't anything outstanding" about the girl.

John Muir, a pharmacist at Layerer's Pharmacy, 1100 Columbus Ave., brought to court a list of medications that had been filled there for Monique: Nine for head lice shampoo from January through August of 1999, and two for Imipramine. Sixty of the 10-milligram capsules were dispensed to Donna Yost on June 1, 1999, and again on June 25, 1999.

Defense attorney Edward M. Czuprynski contends that Donna Yost is innocent, and that Monique died either by suicide or accident.

Also testifying Thursday was Amado Arceo III, a detective with the Michigan State Police, who interviewed Yost on Oct. 15, 1999. He said Donna Yost told him that she felt responsible for her child's death. Arceo said he had no record of asking a follow-up question about that responsibility.

Testimony was to continue at 9 a.m. today in the courtroom of Judge William J. Caprathe.

- Crystal Harmon is a staff writer for The Times. She may be reached at 894-9643 or by e-mail at charmon@bc-times.com.

Young mom facing more charges

Friday, March 03, 2006

DARRYL Q. TUCKERTHE SAGINAW NEWS

A Montrose mother of two facing charges she had her unrestrained infant son on her lap when she intentionally rammed her truck into a bank's brick wall is in more trouble.

Carrie L. Zervan, 22, now must defend herself against three counts of forgery and three counts of uttering and publishing.

Prosecutors said Zervan, who is unemployed, wrote bad checks totaling \$495 on Feb. 17 and 18, 2005, at Good Times Market, 9538 East in Albee Township.

Saginaw County District Judge Terry L. Clark set a \$30,000 cash or surety bond for Zervan.

During a Wednesday, March 15, preliminary hearing, prosecutors will offer evidence to District Judge Darnell Jackson, who will determine whether Zervan should stand trial in Circuit Court.

Meanwhile, Zervan is to undergo psychiatric testing to determine if she is competent to stand trial on charges she had her unrestrained

7-month-old son on her lap as she rammed her Dodge pickup into a Montrose State Bank branch at 10811 Albee (M-13). The incident occurred Feb. 4.

Zervan, already in jail on a \$100,000 cash or surety bond, faces charges of attempted safe-breaking, second-degree child abuse, malicious destruction and breaking and entering a building.

Zervan and her son suffered minor injuries, police said. Her other child was not in the truck, they said. v

Darryl Q. Tucker covers courts for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9686.

Infant's Death Considered Suspicious

Father Questioned By Police

POSTED: 9:55 am EST March 2, 2006

DETROIT -- An autopsy is expected to be performed Thursday on a 10-month-old boy whose death police are calling suspicious.

Duone Alud Jr. (pictured) was dead on arrival early Wednesday at Henry Ford Hospital, Local 4 reported. The boy's mother, Destiny Martin, said she dropped off Duone with his father and his family Friday.

The infant's father was questioned by police about his son's death Wednesday, but no charges have been filed, the station reported.

The infant's grandfather, Carneal Cummings, said his son did nothing wrong. He said the infant was not breathing, so they started cardiopulmonary resuscitation and called 911.

The family said the infant had a history of seizures, but it is not known if the medical condition played a role in his death, Local 4 reported.

Martin said Duone was a very happy child who will be missed.

"He was sweet. He always laughed and played," said Martin. "I just want to know why? Why my baby?"

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Man accused of soliciting child online

Friday, March 03, 2006

FROM LOCAL REPORTS

Muskegon Chronicle

David Michael Braley, 44, of 2957 Westland, Roosevelt Park, remained in the Muskegon County Jail today charged with using a computer to attempt to accost a minor for immoral purposes. He was arrested by investigators from the state attorney general's Child and Public Protection Unit.

The charge carries a potential 10-year prison sentence. Braley failed to post a \$10,000 bond. Braley's arrest brings to 82 the number of alleged Internet sexual predators who have been arrested via the two-year-old state effort, according to state officials.

Attorney General Mike Cox said in a press release that "there is simply no excuse for preying on children."

"Protecting Michigan's children is a responsibility I take very seriously. My office will continue to do everything in our power to make the Internet a safer place for Michigan's children."

Braley was arraigned in 60th District Court before Judge Harold F. Closz III on a single count of "interconnecting another computer to commit a crime," according to court documents.

He is scheduled to be back in court March 15 for a preliminary examination before District Court Judge Michael J. Nolan.

State officials would not reveal the method through which Braley was caught.

Cox asks that parents visit www.michigan.gov/ag for tips on safe Internet use for children.

Citizens can report suspected Internet child predators via the Report Internet Abuses Against Children link or by calling the Child and Public Protection Unit at (313) 456-0180.

Corrected background checks could make our schools safer

Thursday, March 2, 2006
TheTimesHerald.com

A new year marked the beginning of new laws in Michigan that require criminal background checks for all people working in schools. As a father of two, I also want to know my kids will be safe while they are in school.

The previous law mandated background checks for teachers and administrators, but the gap in that law allowed other personnel working directly with our children not to be included.

The Student Safety Initiative was developed to protect students from dangerous individuals who prey on children in a place parents expect and deserve to consider as safe havens - our schools.

Schools should have an environment where kids can feel protected and able to learn. This new initiative keeps convicted sex offenders away from where our kids learn and play.

The yearlong discussion on the package included the additional cost of the program, such as the fingerprinting and background-check process. The cost is necessary to have such a comprehensive history on every employee in our school districts, intermediate school districts, school academies and even nonpublic schools.

A few weeks ago, the Department of Education began the process of implementing the new law, sending school officials a list of their employees with felony charges. This followed news reports from the beginning of the year announcing a search of the Michigan State Police database of 200,000 current school employees revealed about 2,200 convicted felons are working in our education system, and 100 of those were sex criminals.

It since has been discovered those lists have inaccuracies, resulting in the entire background-check effort being questioned. While this is an unfortunate circumstance that must be fixed immediately, parents still deserve the comfort of knowing their children are in a safe environment while at school.

I assumed the Department of Education checked these lists for accuracy before sending them to the school districts, but, as we are finding out, this unfortunately was not the case.

The House already approved legislation that has been sent to the Senate that will ensure Michigan parents have access to accurate lists of convicted felons and sex offenders working in public schools by requiring the Department of Education to ensure the accuracy of its lists before they are distributed.

In addition, the legislation will exempt the lists from the Freedom of Information Act for 14 days after the schools receive the names, giving school officials an opportunity to verify the names as an added protection to personal privacy. We have good staff at our schools who have dedicated their lives to helping children learn and grow. The state must make every effort to protect these invaluable public servants from being tainted with a false criminal record.

I'm confident this effort will provide a balance between the public's right to know who is working with their children and an individual's right not to be wrongly accused.

Phil Pavlov, R-St. Clair Township, represents the 81st District in the Michigan House. Write him: Box 30014, Lansing, 48909; call him: (517) 373-1790 or e-mail him: phillippavlov@house.mi.gov.

Originally published March 2, 2006

Michigan Report

March 2, 2006

TEACHER FELON LIST READY FOR SENATE PASSAGE

Both chambers will soon have passed a version of a new list of teachers and other school personnel with felony records.

The Senate on Thursday moved HB 5675 into position for final passage next week. The bill would correct issues with the list circulated by the Department of Education earlier this year. Among the changes is requiring the departments of Education and State Police to work harder to be sure the list is accurate.

“The deeply flawed list is apparently no longer available,” said Sen. Alan Cropsey (R-DeWitt) of the list that both state and federal courts have now blocked from public dissemination because of the numbers of errors it contained.

Following the letter of the law, the department had provided State Police with a list of school employees. The latter had matched that with its criminal records, returning any match to name or social security number.

“If your name is Jim Johnson, you can imagine how many people have that last name statewide,” Mr. Cropsey said.

The legislation also clarifies which school employees are subject to criminal history checks, limiting the list to those with regular contact with students.

Mr. Cropsey said the changes made by the Senate were largely technical.

MIRS

March 2, 2006

Gov. Signs Sex-Offender Alert Bill

Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** signed a bill today that will allow people to receive e-mail notices when a registered sex offender moves to their ZIP code.

"As a parent, I know how essential it is to have information about the safety of the neighborhoods where my family lives and where my children attend school," Granholm said. "Notifying citizens when a sex offender moves into the neighborhood is one more tool our families can use to help keep themselves and their children safe."

The governor signed **SB 0128**, sponsored by Sen. Alan **SANBORN** (R-Richmond Twp.), which requires the Michigan State Police (MSP) to create a subscriber system that provides e-mail notification when a registered sex offender moves into the designated ZIP code.

Currently, people can look at the sex offender registry on the MSP Web page or can get the list by calling an MSP office. The legislation takes effect on Jan. 1, 2007.

The governor also signed:

-**HB 5245**, sponsored by Rep. David **ROBERTSON** (R-Grand Blanc), which allows certified nurse practitioners to conduct physical exams ordered by a court, board, commission, public body or officer.

-**HB 5498**, sponsored by Rep. Chris **KOLB** (D-Ann Arbor), which transfers \$2 million from the agriculture equine industry development fund, which has fees and taxes from horse racing and Detroit casinos, to the General Fund.

-**SB 0561**, sponsored by Sen. Michelle **McMANUS** (R-Lake Leelanau), which states that "Good Samaritan" liability exemptions apply to members of the national ski patrol system.

-**SB 0751**, sponsored by Sen. Jason **ALLEN** (R-Traverse City), which states that resort owners' corporations must go before the board of trustees to increase dues or levy special assessments.

-**SB 0658**, sponsored by Sen. Allen, which allows certain associations to buy up to 1,000 acres of land to provide summer homes, camp meetings and assembly places for certain associations and societies.

March 2, 2006

GRANHOLM SIGNS EMAIL ALERT ON PREDATORS

Legislation allowing state residents to signup for email alerts if a registered sex offender moves into their zip code has been signed into law by Governor Jennifer Granholm.

SB 128, PA 46, takes effect in January and requires the State Police to create a subscriber system to generate an email to residents if a person now listed on the state's sex offender registry moves into the subscriber's zip code.

Emails would only go to those individuals who have subscribed to the notification system.

The state's sex offender registry is already searchable by zip code on the State Police website. But Ms. Granholm said in a press release: "Notifying citizens when a sex offender moves into the neighborhood is one more tool our families can use to help keep themselves and their children safe."

Other bills were signed on Thursday and are included in the House and Senate activity reports.

The public act numbers for the water diversion package signed earlier are: SB 850, PA 33; SB 851, PA 34; SB 852, PA 35; SB 854, PA 36; SB 857, PA 37.

Home opens doors to teens in crisis

Aimed at runaways, the Connection in Howell can take up to 6 youths for 2 weeks

Friday, March 03, 2006

BY LISA CAROLIN

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

Young people and families in crisis in Livingston County have a new resource. It's called the Connection and is a home in Howell licensed to house up to six 13- to 17-year-olds for up to 14 days each.

"The Connection provides crisis intervention that allows for safety in a conflict," said Janet Loesche, executive director of the Livingston Family Center, which runs the Connection. "It provides a place to go for runaway youth, for youth thinking about running away, for youth in crisis and for youth in need of safety. Our primary goal is to reunite the youth with their families."

The Connection officially opened Jan. 1 and has already housed 10 teenagers. The house was licensed in December, said Maureen Sorbet, a spokeswoman for the state Department of Human Services.

The Pinckney-based Livingston Family Center offers crisis intervention, counseling and family therapy programs. In addition to the Connection, the center operates a Runaway Assistance Program that has an annual budget of about \$95,000. The money comes from the state and from the Livingston County United Way.

The center also has a 24-hour hot line, 1-866-440-7233.

Loesche said that teens cannot be forced to stay at the Connection. But, because the youths are minors, parents must also agree to their children's use of the services.

"We are required to have parents on board within 24 hours," Loesche said. "The Connection is a safe place where youth can get counseling services that can help them talk with their families." While staying at the Connection, the teens are under the 24-hour care of trained staff and can still attend school, go to work and pursue other activities with the help of the staff to transport them. Loesche said most have returned to their homes after their stay at the Connection.

"If that doesn't work, we find a safe, permanent place for them to live or get Children's Protective Services to take over," said Vickie Smith, supervisor of the center's Runaway Assistance Program.

Smith and Loesche said there is value in having a house in Livingston County to serve local teens. Both said kids don't do as well when they're housed in unfamiliar counties.

"Kids shouldn't have to be moved out of the community when there's a crisis," Smith said. "They should be able to see their families as much as they need to."

Smith said the center has been seeing an increase in cases as more people have learned about the agency and because of population growth in the county.

Lisa Carolin can be reached at lcarolin@livingstoncommunitynews.com or 810-844-2010.

State to give birth control to the poor

Controversial plan will provide family planning help to 200,000 women without health coverage.

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News
March 3, 2006

Federal officials on Thursday gave Michigan approval to extend family planning services to 200,000 uninsured women, a controversial plan aimed at saving millions of Medicaid dollars. The plan will use \$183 million from Medicaid to provide birth control to women ages 19-44 who cannot afford it. The plan is expected to save at least \$80 million a year because of the high costs of caring for low-income women with unplanned pregnancies. The state spends more than \$270 million in Medicaid money annually on such pregnancies.

The plan also will feature education and prenatal and postnatal counseling. It will not cover abortion or infertility services.

Those opposed to contraception say the state shouldn't be making it easier for people to use it and think Medicaid dollars could be better spent.

"If a woman is uninsured and she can't afford birth control, she shouldn't have sex," said Anthony Berdych, an Armada resident who is Catholic. "When my mom and dad were in a nursing home, I saw how older people struggle with Medicaid and all the red tape to get coverage in a nursing home and how short the funding is. I would say that is more of a priority than providing birth control for uninsured women."

In 2000, Medicaid paid for prenatal, delivery and post-natal care involved in 26,000 unintended births at a cost of \$11,000 each.

"We believe extending these services to low-income women across our state greatly increases the chance that every pregnancy in Michigan is a wanted one," Granholm said in a prepared statement. "If all pregnancies were intended, the state would see significant reductions in infant mortality, child abuse, child neglect and abortion."

But Paul A. Long, vice president for public policy with the Michigan Catholic Conference was appalled, pointing to a study by the Alan Guttmacher Institute that showed 50 percent of women who had abortions were taking birth control. He also said this will further hurt vulnerable citizens on Medicaid who already struggle to find access to care in an underfunded Medicaid system.

"To think we would spend almost \$200 million of existing dollars for a program that is controversial and won't work 50 percent of the time is a poor decision and poor public policy," Long said. "This diversion of needed resources will tear at the social safety net."

Renee Chelian, executive director of Northland Family Planning Centers, was thrilled. "There is certainly an unmet need for the working uninsured. Most of the health departments have cut

family planning services and with the exception of a couple of agencies that offer low-cost birth control, there are no places for women go."

The federal government gave Michigan the option to unveil this program through a waiver, which allows for existing Medicaid dollars to be used differently. More than 20 other states have been granted a similar waiver.

You can reach Kim Kozlowski at (313) 222-2024 or kkozlowski@detnews.com.

Federal government OKs waiver to extend family planning services

3/2/2006, 5:51 p.m. ET

The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — The federal government has approved the state's request for a Medicaid waiver to extend family planning services to 200,000 women without health insurance coverage, Gov. Jennifer Granholm said Thursday.

"We specifically requested this federal family planning waiver because we believe extending these services to low-income women across our state greatly increases the chance that every pregnancy in Michigan is a wanted one," the governor said in a release. "If all pregnancies were intended, the state would see significant reductions in infant mortality, child abuse, child neglect and abortion."

With the waiver, the Michigan Department of Community Health will be able to provide family planning services to women aged 19 to 44 who otherwise would not have medical coverage for such services.

Department director Janet Olszewski estimates the state Medicaid system will be able to offset \$274 million in Medicaid costs and avoid 19,400 unintended pregnancies by offering family planning services. The waiver does not include health care coverage for abortions or infertility treatments, she said.

Department data for 2001 showed that 40.6 percent of all pregnancies that year were unintended. It's estimated that reducing the number of unintended pregnancies by 10 percent could save the state more than \$27 million in annual Medicaid spending.

On the Net:

Michigan Department of Community Health: <http://www.michigan.gov/mdch>

Gov. Jennifer Granholm: <http://www.michigan.gov/gov>

Michigan gets OK to use Medicaid dollars for birth control

LANSING, Mich. (AP) -- The federal government has given Michigan approval to provide birth control to 200,000 uninsured women.

The plan, approved Thursday, will use \$183 million from Medicaid to provide birth control to women ages 19-44 who cannot afford it. It is expected to save at least \$80 million a year because of the high cost of caring for low-income women with unplanned pregnancies. The state spends more than \$270 million in Medicaid money annually on such pregnancies.

The plan also will provide education and prenatal and postnatal counseling. It will not cover abortion or infertility services.

"We believe extending these services to low-income women across our state greatly increases the chance that every pregnancy in Michigan is a wanted one," Granholm said in a statement. "If all pregnancies were intended, the state would see significant reductions in infant mortality, child abuse, child neglect and abortion."

Paul A. Long, vice president for public policy at the Michigan Catholic Conference, said it was a poor decision because birth control doesn't always work. He said the program would further hurt vulnerable citizens on Medicaid who already struggle to find access to care in an underfunded Medicaid system.

"To think we would spend almost \$200 million of existing dollars for a program that is controversial and won't work 50 percent of the time is a poor decision and poor public policy," Long told The Detroit News. "This diversion of needed resources will tear at the social safety net."

Information from: The Detroit News, <http://www.detnews.com>

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Michigan Report

March 2, 2006

STATE WINS WAIVER ON FAMILY PLANNING FOR THE POOR

Approval of a federal Medicaid waiver means the state will be able to provide family planning services for low-income women who do not have health insurance, state officials said Thursday.

Approval of the waiver, originally requested last year, means as many as 200,000 women ages 19 to 44 could get access to contraception and other family planning services, Governor Jennifer Granholm and Community Health Director Janet Olszewski said in a press release.

Abortions and infertility treatments would not be covered under the proposal.

The waiver is part a program Ms. Granholm announced last year to help end unintended pregnancies. Among the other initiatives is one called "Talk Early, Talk Often" that helps teach parents how to talk to their middle school children about sexual activity and abstinence.

The program also calls for contraceptive equity between the sexes, meaning proposals to have health insurance provide contraception.

Ms. Olszewski said that every dollar the state can spend to help prevent women from having unwanted pregnancies equals a savings of \$3 spent on Medicaid-related delivery and medical care for newborns.

In fiscal year 2000, the state paid for an estimated 26,000 births that were unintended, at a total cost of more than \$286 million, officials said.

Critical Part of Plan to Reduce Unintended Pregnancies Approved

Granholm Expands Eligibility for Family Planning Services

LANSING – Governor Jennifer M. Granholm today announced that the federal government has approved her administration's request for a Medicaid waiver to extend family planning services to 200,000 women without health insurance coverage in Michigan. The waiver was approved on Wednesday.

"We specifically requested this federal family planning waiver because we believe extending these services to low-income women across our state greatly increases the chance that every pregnancy in Michigan is a wanted one," Granholm said today. "If all pregnancies were intended, the state would see significant reductions in infant mortality, child abuse, child neglect, and abortion."

Granholm first announced plans for the waiver when she unveiled her Blueprint for Preventing Unintended Pregnancies in July 2005 that also includes two other initiatives: "Talk Early, Talk Often," a pilot program that gives middle school parents tools for holding conversations about sexuality and abstinence with their children; and contraceptive equity for men and women.

Through the state's new family planning waiver, the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) will now provide family planning services to women – ages 19 to 44 – who otherwise would not have medical coverage for these services.

Janet Olszewski, director of the Michigan Department of Community Health, said women at or below 185 percent of poverty who reside in Michigan and meet Medicaid citizenship requirements now qualify for the extension of services.

"We estimate that Michigan's Medicaid program will be able to offset \$274 million in Medicaid and avoid 19,400 unintended pregnancies that we would otherwise have had to absorb," Olszewski said. "Our Medicaid staff worked tirelessly with the federal government to seek approval of this waiver, and we are extremely proud of their continued efforts."

In addition, Olszewski said the waiver does not include coverage for abortions or treatment of infertility. Eighteen other states have similar waivers for family planning services.

It is estimated that each public dollar spent to provide family planning services saves an estimated \$3 that would otherwise be spent in Medicaid costs for pregnancy-related care and medical care for newborns, according to national Medicaid research.

MDCH's Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS - a survey of maternal experiences and behaviors before and during a woman's pregnancy) data for the year 2001 shows that 40.6 percent of all pregnancies were unintended.

The total cost to Medicaid for the delivery of a baby and first year of life is \$11,528 – with the cost of delivery averaging \$6,197 and the cost of first year of life services averaging \$5,331. In FY 2000, the state Medicaid program paid for prenatal, delivery, and post-natal care of roughly 26,000 unintended births. Each birth cost Medicaid \$11,000, which translates to \$286 million in costs for Michigan.

If Michigan can reduce the number of unintended pregnancies by only 10 percent, it would save the state over \$27 million in Medicaid expenditures annually.

Metron care facility almost lost U.S. backing

Friday, March 03, 2006

By Pat Shellenbarger

The Grand Rapids Press

A Big Rapids nursing home, where a woman died last year for lack of oxygen, came within a day of losing its Medicare and Medicaid eligibility because of continuing violations of state and federal standards.

During an annual inspection at Metron of Big Rapids in November 2004, state inspectors found 26 rule violations, most dealing with the health and safety of residents. The average number of violations for Michigan nursing homes is nine, state records show.

The report about those violations -- "citations" is the word state inspectors use -- is 89 pages long and details repeated instances of residents developing severe bed sores, suffering injuries without follow-up investigations and enduring violations of their privacy.

"This is pretty typical of Metron," said Frances Grant, deputy director of Citizens for Better Care, a nonprofit advocacy group for nursing home residents.

Over the past two or three years, Grant said, she has noticed an increasing number of citations against the nine West Michigan nursing homes owned by Metron Integrated Health Systems, based in Cascade Township. Many of those violations, she said, may be due to a high staff turnover in the nursing home business.

"All of this turnover causes a domino effect: call lights being left on longer, bed sores developing, hydration issues," Grant said. "I would say Metron, as a corporation, has to look at how their nursing homes are run and what their priorities are."

When a state inspection uncovers violations, state inspectors schedule a follow-up visit to see if they have been corrected. In the case of Metron of Big Rapids, it took four follow-up visits.

When the inspectors returned in January 2005, they found 13 violations. They came back last March and found six violations. In May, they found five.

Because of those repeated violations, the state Department of Community Health notified Metron of Big Rapids it would lose its Medicare and Medicaid funding May 19, 2005, unless it was cleared of all violations, a move that likely would have forced it to close. The day before that deadline, state inspectors visited the home a fourth time and found no violations.

While those violations were pending, Sarah Comer, 50, died at Metron of Big Rapids.

On Monday, Michigan Attorney General Michael Cox filed felony charges against eight of the home's former employees, claiming Comer died because her oxygen tank ran empty. Some of those employees falsified medical records to cover up the cause of Comer's death, Cox charged. Seven of the former employees -- five nurses, a nurse's aide and the home's medical director -- are scheduled to be arraigned today in Mecosta County District Court on a variety of charges, ranging from involuntary manslaughter to failing to report the abuse of a patient. The home's former administrator, now a resident of South Carolina, is expected to be charged later.

D.C. Gets Warning On Care Of Wards

Judge Impatient For Group Home Improvements

By Karlyn Barker
Washington Post Staff Writer

Friday, March 3, 2006; Page B01

An exasperated federal judge warned the District government yesterday that it is running out of time to demonstrate that it can make meaningful progress in improving care for physically and mentally disabled residents in its long-troubled group homes.

U.S. District Judge Ellen Segal Huvelle expressed frustration on being told that the city had failed to meet a 90-day deadline on a court order to move a designated number of group home residents into better, safer housing; help others find assisted employment opportunities; improve health care for at-risk clients; and recruit new group home operators to provide higher-quality care.

"The fact that you can't do the things that you promised to do is a terrible indictment," Huvelle told a packed courtroom. "It's a pretty devastating admission."

Huvelle's comments came during the latest hearing in a 30-year-old class-action lawsuit that centers on the quality of care for people who are mentally disabled wards of the District, many of whom also have severe physical disabilities. The lawsuit was filed in 1976 on behalf of hundreds of residents of Forest Haven, the city's former institution for people with mental retardation. The judge listened as various parties in the lawsuit, including those representing the District, recounted their disappointment at the city's inability to complete several initiatives aimed at showing that it could improve services for its most vulnerable citizens.

Attorneys for the plaintiffs said they plan to return to court in the next few weeks to seek additional legal remedies for their clients. Among the options, they said, is filing a request to have the judge place the city's Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Administration in receivership -- a move that could result in an outsider overseeing responsibilities.

"The time has come for a new approach," plaintiffs' counsel Cathy Costanzo of the Center for Public Representation told the judge. "Something more and something different must happen. . . . Our class members suffer daily."

The center is working with University Legal Services in representing the plaintiffs and recently retained a law firm to help in filing for additional action by the court.

Elizabeth Jones, the court monitor in the case, repeated for Huvelle the recent findings of her report on the District's efforts to comply with the judge's orders. She said the health and safety of the city's mentally retarded wards remain in jeopardy because of continuing problems with health care, nutrition and supervision. In November, Jones found that a pattern of neglect had led to four deaths in the past year.

Jones said the city made three of 46 promised housing relocations; found assisted employment for five of 42 people; did not fully implement health care improvements for 48 people; and failed to add any providers to the mix of housing options.

Marie Amato, senior assistant attorney general for the District's Office of the Attorney General, told Huvelle that the District was making headway. She said that since the court monitor's report was filed last month, the agency has completed new health care plans for the 48 clients and has lined up 10 new providers who will offer high-quality housing options for people living in group homes.

Individual contracts with the providers have not been finalized, she said. The District is also closing down several homes operated by a problem contractor.

NEWS IN A MINUTE: Oakland County

March 3, 2006

TROY: Hearing on day care centers is March 20

A public hearing to decide whether some child care providers will be allowed to continue operating day care centers from their homes has been postponed.

It was scheduled for Monday's Troy City Council meeting, but the hearing has been moved to the March 20 meeting. It is set for 7:30 p.m. at City Hall, 500 W. Big Beaver.

The city is scrutinizing child care providers who are licensed to care for seven to 12 children in their homes.

While the state licenses these types of child care providers, they currently are not permitted in Troy. Despite that, there are 19 such licensed child day care providers in Troy.

Some people are concerned that the day care centers increase traffic and noise in residential neighborhoods. Also, the local ordinance does not allow in-home businesses that employ people, but state law requires that day care centers with more than six children have more than one adult supervising.

By Cecilia Oleck

House moves to block rules favoring unionized adult foster homes

3/2/2006, 2:28 p.m. ET

The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — The state House passed legislation Thursday that supporters say would stop state regulators from showing favoritism to adult foster care homes whose workers are covered by collective bargaining agreements.

The five-bill package passed 56-45 along party lines, with Republicans supporting it and Democrats voting against it.

About 50,000 Michigan residents live in adult foster care facilities and homes for the aged. The homes care for people over age 60 who can't live alone because of physical impairment or mental illness, but who don't need the level of care given in nursing homes.

Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm has responded to concerns about the quality of care for home residents by asking state officials to review administrative rules regulating assisted-living providers.

The draft rules would require facilities to report wage information, benefits, turnover rates, employee retention data and Social Security numbers for each employee. The state Department of Human Services or Department of Community Health could consider the factors when issuing a license.

Those rules would allow homes with collective bargaining agreements to use those agreements as evidence they comply with certain requirements.

Republicans said the rules would create unnecessary regulations that most easily could be met by unionized facilities while unfairly burdening ones without collective bargaining agreements.

The bills passed Thursday would ban the rules from discriminating for or against facilities based on whether they have collective bargaining agreements.

The Senate already has passed some bills acted on by the House on Thursday, but other bills in the package will be headed to the Senate for the first time.

The assisted-living industry supports the legislation. It says complying with new rules would cost an extra \$35 million a year.

Republican Rep. Darwin Booher of Evart did not vote. Neither did Democrats Marsha Cheeks of Detroit, Tupac Hunter of Detroit, LaMar Lemmons Jr. of Detroit, LaMar Lemmons III of Detroit, Jeff Mayes of Bay City and Bill McConico of Detroit.

The foster care home bills are Senate Bills 1026-28 and House Bills 5744-45.

On the Net:

Michigan Legislature: <http://www.michiganlegislature.org>

Woman injured in domestic assault, stabbing

Kelly Nankervis, Midland Daily News

03/03/2006

A 56-year-old Midland man was jailed Thursday afternoon after being accused of stabbing his wife with a 9-inch-long blade.

The woman, 49, was taken to MidMichigan Medical Center for treatment for stab wounds to one of her legs and a hand after the 4:25 p.m. attack. Midland Police Deputy Chief Bob Lane said police reports list the woman as in critical condition.

Lane said reports on the incident are not yet completed, and he did not know why the pair were fighting.

The stabbing occurred at the couple's home, and was called in to police by their 17-year-old son, who witnessed the incident along with his 16-year-old sister.

Alcohol was a factor, Lane said.

Lansing State Journal

Letters

March 3, 2006

Highfields helps

As a Lansing public school teacher, I have known, been associated with and done business with Highfields Inc. for more than 30 years. I have taken students to its campus and worked with students who were involved in several of its residential programs.

I have never encountered a student who felt he or she was abused or mistreated in any way. Many students have told me the program helped them and they were glad they had the opportunity to go to Highfields.

The school district and the community as a whole have precious few resources to deal with troubled youth. Over the years, Highfields has been a positive and productive resource to the school district and the community. It is imperative that this resource continue to be available for those children in need.

Deborah Gasser
Holt

Low-income project cuts costs

Friday, March 03, 2006

By Lawrence R. Heibel

The Grand Rapids Press

WALKER -- When low-income residents and those with disabilities move into the Kingsbury Place apartment complex this fall, they will not have to worry about high electric and natural gas bills.

The 44-unit complex under construction by Genesis Non-Profit Housing Corp. at 725 North Center Drive NW is the corporation's first "green community," featuring energy-saving appliances, building construction and other environmentally sensitive features.

"Whatever we can do to lessen our residents' utility costs, we need to do," said Genesis Executive Director Harold Mast. "It's a much cleaner environment and less expensive."

The community is the first green, low-income housing project supported by Michigan Green Communities, a collaboration between the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, the Great Lakes Capital Fund and Enterprise Community Partners, a Maryland-based provider of development capital for affordable housing projects. Michigan Green Communities provided a \$91,000 grant for technology in the \$7.2 million complex.

The community is constructed with heavily insulated walls, and heating and cooling systems are high-efficiency.

Mast said the community also will feature native grasses and landscaping that requires little watering or maintenance.

Mast said the project's green aspects cost Genesis an additional \$150,000. He said the high efficiencies should allow the extra cost to be recouped in less than five years.

Filling empty bowls

Pinckney fundraising dinner support community food bank

Friday, March 03, 2006

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

Fourth grade can seem a long way away to students who eagerly anticipate making their first vessel for Pinckney's annual Empty Bowls Dinner.

Ryan Boyes, 10, a Farley Hill Elementary School student, has finally made it.

"Both my sisters still have their bowls," he said, as he formed a chunk of moist brown clay into a carefully crafted leaf bowl. "They sit on our phone desk."

The bowl makers, in fourth- through 12th-grades, can buy their own bowls, but more than 1,000 of them will be donated to this year's event to remind those who attend that somewhere "someone's bowl is always empty."

The Empty Bowls Dinner, a simple soup supper set for 5-8 p.m. Thursday in the Pinckney Community High School commons, is one of the biggest fundraisers of the year for Gleaners Community Food Bank of Livingston.

"There are people who don't have money to go to the store and buy food every day like most of our parents," Ryan said. "It's nice to be able to do something for them."

In 12 years, the event has raised more than \$90,000 for the food bank and its Shared Harvest Pantry.

"I've worked at Gleaners Food Bank with my Girl Scout troop," said 10-year-old Farley Hill fourth-grader Carlie Morris. "I've seen what it's like to need help."

More than 1,000 people attended last year's dinner, which raised about \$11,000. This year's goal is \$15,000, said Erica Karfonta, director of operations for the county's food bank.

"The thing I love about Empty Bowls is that it brings the entire Pinckney community together," Karfonta said. "The whole community helps those here who are struggling."

The number of people needing assistance continues to increase, Karfonta said, especially among children and senior citizens. More than 1,000 people get food from the Shared Harvest Pantry each month, a 40 percent increase from a year ago, she said. Stephanie Couch, one of the many Pinckney art teachers who guide young bowl artists every year, gets nearly as excited about the event as her students.

"They just love being involved," Couch said. "Especially the fourth-graders. This is their first chance to get involved. They love to see people choose their bowls."

The Empty Bowls Dinner also features a local business exposition, performances from student musicians and actors and a silent art auction. The signature of the meal is the nearly 300 gallons of soup donated by nearly three dozen area restaurants.

Carl Welser, retired pastor of Hamburg Township's St. Paul Lutheran Church, has been "The Soup Seeker" for 11 years.

"It's a true delight," Welser said. "You walk in the door of a restaurant and they just say, 'Oh, it's soup time again.' Not too many places turn you down."

Welser, too, likes seeing teachers, students, parents, community leaders and businesses involved in this event.

"I know there are folks out there who depend on the food bank to tide them over through very difficult times," Welser said. "It's a delight to see that so many people realize Empty Bowls supports a very good cause."

Leanne Smith can be reached at lsmith@livingstoncommunitynews.com or 810-844-2011.

Needy children helped

Friday, March 03, 2006

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS –

An initiative called "Angel Baby" concluded Thursday at the Salvation Army, as members of the Kent County Education Association passed along gifts for needy children. Members of the KCEA have been collecting personal items for infants to children age 5 whose families might not otherwise have the means. The items include shampoo, baby food, clothes, bottles, diapers and toys. They will be distributed to families throughout the community based on need.

Cuts affect social services

By PATRICK SULLIVAN

Record-Eagle staff writer

March 3, 2006

BEULAH - State social workers responsible for monitoring child abuse and the welfare of the elderly packed up their desks and moved out of Benzie County.

State budget cuts caused the Department of Human Services in January to cut staffing at its office in Beulah and relocate workers to Manistee.

The move worries Benzie County Probate Judge Nancy Kida, who depends on child protective services workers to investigate allegations of child abuse and recommend removal of children from homes.

"We're really concerned about it because we don't have our own worker, particularly with child protections services," Kida said.

Staff losses are the result of budget cuts enacted by the legislature and passed on to local offices from Lansing, said Doug Lapham, director of Benzie-Manistee DHS.

Lapham said he learned in late December he would have to cut five positions, reducing employees for the two counties from 35 to 30. Cuts were made in January.

Workers who determine eligibility for Medicaid and cash and food assistance will remain in an office at the governmental center in Beulah, but service workers were relocated to Manistee.

Lapham said the relocation of those workers to Manistee should not affect their ability to do their job in Benzie.

Still, Lapham said as caseloads increased, employee numbers decreased at DHS. He said over the past five years there are 30 percent fewer workers, while caseloads increased by over 40 percent.

"Pretty much this agency's in a crisis, staffing wise," Lapham said.

Friday, March 03, 2006

Pointing fingers doesn't get state's job done

Speaker Craig DeRoche

Michigan has weathered a difficult road the past few years. We are the only state to lose jobs in both 2004 and 2005, and by any objective standard we are at or near the bottom of the barrel in economic growth in this country. As other states are enjoying budget surpluses and robust jobs growth, Michigan continues to lag behind.

Michigan families are rightfully looking to their elected officials in Washington and Lansing for solutions to the malaise that is forcing our best and brightest to seek greener pastures in other states.

After spending the first year of her administration blaming our woes on former Gov. John Engler and the next two years blaming President George W. Bush, it appears that the Republican-led Legislature is the latest target for criticism from Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

The "do-nothing" obstructionist card is a time-honored political tactic used by seasoned politicians who understand the value of finding a scapegoat when things aren't going so well. Finger-pointing wastes time

The Granholm administration continues to waste valuable time and energy by passing the buck for every problem or mishap afflicting our state. In the first two months of this year alone, executive branch missteps and bureaucratic snafus have had far-reaching and disastrous consequences for Michigan.

The Student Safety Initiative, designed to provide school districts and parents with an up-to-date list of felons working in the public schools, was so badly botched by the administration that the list was horribly inaccurate. Innocent teachers were fingered as felons, and the ensuing media firestorm has negated the positive impact this new law will have in keeping truly dangerous criminals and sex offenders from our public schools.

Mistakes made in the Ricky Holland child abuse case and the improper early prison release of accused murderer Patrick Allen Selepak have had even more disastrous consequences. Innocent lives were lost. At a minimum, taxpayers expect their government to keep them safe and secure - and the Granholm administration needs to stop spending time pointing fingers and start taking a hard look at the executive-level failures that led to a complete breakdown in the safeguards protecting our families.

GOP fights bad plans

Contrast this record with what has happened in the Legislature.

For the first time in three years, the Legislature forced the governor to sign a budget that did not raise taxes or fees. We demanded that state government start living within its means again. This sent an important signal to entrepreneurs and job providers that Michigan was a secure place to invest and expand.

We passed the Michigan Telecommunications Act, making Michigan a more competitive environment in the information age for investments in high-speed Internet access, wireless initiatives and other vital communications infrastructure.

We secured our heritage as the Great Lakes state by passing landmark legislation regulating water withdrawals to protect our state's most precious natural resource.

Our struggling manufacturers are already benefiting this year from a \$600 million tax cut passed by the Legislature and signed by the governor late last year. This critically important assistance for our automakers and other manufacturers only came about because Republican legislators stood firm in opposing the governor's original tax shift plan, which would have cut taxes for some businesses while raising them on others. Her revenue-neutral proposal would have been job-neutral for Michigan's economy, and would have continued imposing a Single Business Tax on Michigan job providers that is the most punishing and costly business tax in the nation.

Define obstructionist

I am proud to have led the opposition to bad tax and regulatory proposals made by this administration. If that's being an obstructionist, I'll wear that label as a badge of honor.

When we have found consensus, I am proud to have marshaled bipartisan coalitions in the House to send legislation expeditiously to the governor's desk. Where we have disagreed on principle, I have been proud to fight for families and job providers to ensure their tax dollars are spent wisely.

Michigan is at a crossroads with our economy and our public safety in serious need of attention. Rather than investing such large amounts of time to shifting blame, I hope the Granholm administration will focus on the larger picture of getting our economy back on track, and fulfilling its most important duty of providing for the safety of Michigan citizens. Pointing fingers isn't getting the job done.

State Rep. Craig DeRoche, R-Novi, is speaker of the Michigan House of Representatives. E-mail: letters@detnews.com.

SD given \$70,000 grant for early learning services

Oakland Press Staff writer Dave Groves

Oakland Schools has received \$70,000 in grant funding to strengthen local early childhood learning and care programs. The award is part of \$1.24 million the Early Childhood Investment Corporation has allocated to support 14 Great Start program collaboratives across the state.

As the local fiduciary for the grant, Oakland Schools will help coordinate community assessments and develop strategic plans for a comprehensive system of early childhood services and supports accessible to all children from birth to kindergarten.

"These grants will help bring together the public and private sectors, including government, business, civic, faith, education and community groups to develop a long-standing, sustained focus on early learning and childhood development," said Marvin McKinney, chair of the ECIC board.

In addition to collaboration readiness criteria, ECIC board members considered the number of area children in poverty as well as geographic balance to determine the distribution of funds.

For more information about the ECIC and Project Great Start, visit the Project Great Start Web site at www.michigan.gov/greatstart.



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

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MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING



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Media Advisory

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Ingham County collaborative receives \$60,000 Great Start Collaborative grant

WHAT: Ceremonial check presentation for grant to Ingham county collaborative from the Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC).

The \$60,000 grant will be used to support the local Great Start Collaborative, bringing together the public, private and non-profit sectors to develop a long-standing, sustained focus on early childhood development and care.

WHEN: Monday, March 6, 2006
1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

WHERE: Early Head Start/Great Parent, Great Start Office
Second Floor Playroom (follow signs in building)
727 N. Jenison Street
Lansing, MI

WHO: Speakers at this event include:
Marianne Udow, DHS director and ECIC board member
Mike Foley, chief operating officer, ECIC
Mike Flanagan, State Superintendent of Public Instruction
Stanley Kogut, Ingham ISD Superintendent
John Melcher, Michigan State University (co-chair Power of We)
Mike Brown, Capital Area United Way (co-chair Power of We)
Sen. Valde Garcia (invited)
Rep. Diane Byrum (invited)
Rep. Michael Murphy (invited)
Rep. Gretchen Whitmer (invited)

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